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ISSUE: CHANGE

Resistance is futile

BY JIM CARROLL

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Some people have problems accepting change, even simple things such as the new upside-down ketchup bottle, but to succeed we need to see change as an opportunity.

Go on, admit it: You still set the "upside down" ketchup bottle down cap up.

You're not alone. Lots of people — adults mostly — automatically turn the bottle so the white cap is at the top — even though it's been almost a year since Heinz started to offer the new bottle.

It's a pretty good example that when change comes about, there are plenty of people who struggle to adapt.

Of course, we can all be forgiven for an inability to cope with ketchup bottle change because it involves instinct and ingrained behaviour.

It's when we can't deal with other kind of change — things that you have to control and adapt to — that things go wrong.

The problem is, we live in a time that involves a rapid rate of change. Just take a look around. Technology continues to invade our workplaces, resulting in massive change to day-to-day business processes and procedures. The customers and marketplace have changed, with so much new competition that the idea of "captive consumers" and "guaranteed revenue streams" has gone by the wayside.

New products come and go at an increasing and often infuriating pace as innovation comes to take hold in many organizations. Mergers, breakups, reorganizations and restructuring result in an almost constant shuffling of job and career responsibilities.

In times like these, you can guarantee yourself that there will be much more new in your life tomorrow than just a different ketchup bottle.

Yet the issue of change continues to be a big problem for organizations, because so many people find it difficult — or simply don't want — to cope.

The implications are huge: Projects get bogged down or fail. Tension and workplace stress rise. Misguided strategies are introduced and ill-founded rumours fly.

All the classic signs of an organization full of people who aren't prepared to cope with change.

If you are dealing with these realities — either as an individual seeking to enhance your career, or as an executive responsible for taking your organization forward — there are a few ways out:

Get into the right frame of mind

Years ago, the Pogo comic strip featured a panel in which he observed: "We is faced with insurmountable opportunities." Rather than seeing change as a threat, take a look for the opportunity that might exist within any type of change.

The wrong frame of mind is illustrated in a comment by Ogden Nash: "Progress is great but it has gone on far too long." If that is the way you react to new technologies and new ways of working, then you are almost making it certain that you'll battle progress — and as soon as you do, you'll be setting yourself back.

Get rid of your 'not-my' barriers

Many people and corporate cultures react to any type of change, particularly those involving business or workplace processes or corporate structure, by erecting as many barriers as they can.

Immediately, the refrain starts — it is "not my department/responsibility/job/area of expertise/problem/day!"

Putting up such barriers almost guarantees that you'll let the change get the worst of you. Rather than trying to avoid something, seek to take an active role. That way, you'll guarantee yourself a learning experience, develop new skills and capabilities, and ensure that you take an active and healthy role in helping to ensure that the specific type of change is successful.

Don't deny change

Accept the inevitability of change. Like it or not, things will be different tomorrow. There's a statistic that is used by Australia's innovation council chairman: 65 per cent of children in pre-school will be employed in roles and jobs that don't exist today.

Believe that, and use it as a barometer for the type of change that is set to occur within every job and career today.

Banish from the workplace the worst phrase ever to be coined: "We've always done it that way." Well, so what? Maybe that means it's ripe for a change. Why not try something new?

One day, someone at Heinz looked at the same old ketchup bottle they'd been selling for decades, and asked, "Why not turn it upside down?" Can you imagine the reaction — a likely chorus of naysayers who immediately suggested that it would be impossible, and perhaps downright dumb, to do such a thing. Yet look at the result today — a practical, sensible new product — and it is evident that the change was a success.

Anticipate change

Establish some type of "change radar." You should always be on the lookout for signs of the forthcoming business and industry change that might affect you. Keep your ears and eyes tuned for any signs that could result in a change in your job or career circumstances. If you learn to identify the signs of impending change, then you can begin to determine what you might need to do to enhance your career skills, any necessary training you might need to take, in addition to gaining insight into some of the new responsibilities and activities that you might be able to undertake.

Adopt the attitude of kids

The younger generation today seems to have an ingrained ability to cope with change. They see the ketchup bottle, and say "Kewwwelll!" They're accustomed to change — because they are growing up in the midst of it. To them change is normal and to be expected.

Adopt their attitude — "change is cool" — by turning every situation of change into an opportunity rather than a threat.

Jim Carroll is a Mississauga-based consultant and speaker and author of Surviving the Information Age.

globecareers@globeandmail.ca